

treatments you need. And you'll be able to appeal unfair decisions by insurance companies to an independent party.

If this legislation becomes law, workers won't have to worry about losing coverage if they lose or change jobs, families will save on their premiums, businesses that would see their costs rise if we do not act will save money now, and they will save money in the future. This bill will strengthen Medicare and extend the life of the program. It will make coverage affordable for over 30 million Americans who do not have it—30 million Americans. And because it is paid for and curbs the waste and inefficiency in our health care system, this bill will help reduce our deficit by as much as \$1.3 trillion in the coming decades, making it the largest deficit reduction plan in over a decade.

As I've said before, these are not small reforms, these are big reforms. If passed, this will be the most important piece of social legislation since the Social Security Act in the 1930s and the most important reform of our health care system since Medicare passed in the 1960s. And what makes it so important is not just its cost savings or its deficit reductions. It's the impact reform will have on Americans who no longer have to go without a checkup or prescriptions that they need because they can't afford them, on families who no longer have to worry that a single illness will send them into financial ruin, and on businesses that will no longer face exorbitant insurance rates that hamper their competitiveness. It's the difference reform will make in the lives of the American people.

I want to commend Senator Harry Reid, extraordinary work that he did; Speaker Pelosi for her extraordinary leadership and dedica-

tion. Having passed reform bills in both the House and the Senate, we now have to take up the last and most important step and reach an agreement on a final reform bill that I can sign into law. And I look forward to working with Members of Congress in both Chambers over the coming weeks to do exactly that.

With today's vote, we are now incredibly close to making health insurance reform a reality in this country. Our challenge then is to finish the job. We can't doom another generation of Americans to soaring costs and eroding coverage and exploding deficits. Instead, we need to do what we were sent here to do and improve the lives of the people we serve. For the sake of our citizens, our economy, and our future, let's make 2010 the year we finally reform health care in the United States of America.

Everybody, merry Christmas, happy New Year.

The President's Message to U.S. Military Personnel

Q. Do you have a holiday wish for the troops?

The President. I do, and I will be actually—I'm on my way right now to call a few of them and wish them merry Christmas and to thank them for their extraordinary service as they're posted in Iraq and Afghanistan.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:47 a.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to H.R. 3590. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

The President's Weekly Address *December 24, 2009*

The President. Hello, everyone, and merry Christmas. As you and your families gather to celebrate the holidays, we want to take a moment to send greetings from our family: from me, from Michelle, from Malia, Sasha, and from Bo.

The First Lady. This is our first Christmas in the White House, and we are so grateful for this extraordinary experience. Not far from here, in the Blue Room, is the official White House Christmas tree. It's an 18-foot tall Douglas-fir from West Virginia, and it's

decorated with hundreds of ornaments designed by people and children from all over the country. Each one is a reminder of the traditions we cherish as Americans and the blessings we're thankful for this holiday season.

The President. That's right, especially as we continue to recover from an extraordinary recession that still has so many Americans hurting: parents without a job who struggled to put presents under the Christmas tree; families and neighbors who've seen their homes foreclosed; and folks wondering what the new year will bring.

But even in these tough times, there's still so much to celebrate this Christmas: a message of peace and brotherhood that continues to inspire more than 2,000 years after Jesus' birth, the love of family and friends, the bonds of community and country, and the character and courage of our men and women in uniform who are far from home for the holidays, away from their families, risking their lives to protect ours.

To all our soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and coast guardsmen: I have no greater honor than serving as your Commander in Chief. I've been awed by your selfless spirit, your eagerness to serve, at the Naval Academy and West Point. I've been energized by your dedication to duty, from Baghdad to the Korean Peninsula. Michelle and I have been moved by your determination: wounded warriors at Walter Reed and Bethesda fighting to recover, to get back to your units.

And I've been humbled profoundly by patriots who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom, in flag-draped caskets coming home at Dover, in the quiet solitude of Arlington. And after years of multiple tours of duty, as you carry on our missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, your service, your readiness to make that same sacrifice, is an inspiration to us and to every single American.

The First Lady. And so are your families. As First Lady, one of my greatest privileges is to visit with military families across the country. I've met military spouses doing the parenting of two, keeping the household together, juggling play dates and soccer games, helping with homework, doing everything they can to make

the kids feel okay even as they try to hide their own fears and worries.

I've met kids who wonder when mom or dad is coming home, grandparents and relatives who step in to care for wounded warriors, and folks trying to carry on after losing the person they loved most in the world. And through it all, these families somehow still find the time and the energy to serve their communities as well, coaching Little League, running the PTA, raising money to help those less fortunate than they are, and more.

But even these strong military families can use a hand, especially during the holidays. If you live near a military base, you can reach out through your workplaces, your schools, your churches. There are so many ways to help, with childcare, with errands, or just by bringing over a home-cooked meal. Even if you don't know a military family nearby, your family can still help by donating or volunteering at organizations that support military families.

The President. You can also reach out directly to our forces around the world. Kids can make a card that will bring a smile to an American far from home. Adults can send a care package or a prepaid phone card that makes the tour just a little bit easier. Every American can do something to support our troops, even if it's as simple as just saying thank you. For more ways to let our troops know you care, go to www.whitehouse.gov.

So to all our men and women in uniform spending the holidays far away from home, whether it's at a base here in the States, a mess hall in Iraq, or a remote outpost in Afghanistan, know that you are in our thoughts and in our prayers. And this holiday season—and every holiday season—know that we are doing everything in our power to make sure you can succeed in your missions and come home safe to your families.

The First Lady. And to all Americans, from our family to yours, merry Christmas.

The President. Merry Christmas, everybody.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 3:05 p.m. on December 22 in the Diplomatic Reception Room at the White House for broadcast on December 26. The transcript was

made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 24, but was embargoed for release until 6 p.m. on December 24. The

Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Statement on the Death of Percy Sutton *December 27, 2009*

Percy Sutton was a true hero to African Americans in New York City and around the country. We will remember him for his service to the country as a Tuskegee airman, to New York State as a State assemblyman, to New York City as Manhattan borough president, and to the community of Harlem in leading

the effort to revitalize the world renowned Apollo Theater. His life-long dedication to the fight for civil rights and his career as an entrepreneur and public servant made the rise of countless young African Americans possible.

Michelle and I extend our deepest condolences to his family on this sad day.

Remarks in Kaneohe, Hawaii *December 28, 2009*

Attempted Terrorist Act on Northwest Airlines Flight 253

Hey, guys. Good morning, everybody. I want to take just a few minutes to update the American people on the attempted terrorist attack that occurred on Christmas Day and the steps we're taking to ensure the safety and security of the country.

The investigation's ongoing, and I spoke again this morning with Attorney General Eric Holder, the Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano, and my Counterterrorism and Homeland Security Adviser, John Brennan. I asked them to keep—continue monitoring the situation, to keep the American people and Members of Congress informed.

Here's what we know so far. On Christmas Day, Northwest Airlines Flight 253 was en route from Amsterdam, Netherlands, to Detroit. As the plane made its final approach to Detroit Metropolitan Airport, a passenger allegedly tried to ignite an explosive device on his body, setting off a fire.

Thanks to the quick and heroic actions of passengers and crew, the suspect was immediately subdued, the fire was put out, and the plane landed safely. The suspect is now in custody and has been charged with attempting to destroy an aircraft. And a full investigation has been launched into this attempted act of ter-

rorism, and we will not rest until we find all who were involved and hold them accountable.

Now, this was a serious reminder of the dangers that we face and the nature of those who threaten our homeland. Had the suspect succeeded in bringing down that plane, it could have killed nearly 300 passengers and crew, innocent civilians preparing to celebrate the holidays with their families and friends.

The American people should be assured that we are doing everything in our power to keep you and your families safe and secure during this busy holiday season. Since I was first notified of this incident, I've ordered the following actions to be taken to protect the American people and to secure air travel.

First, I directed that we take immediate steps to ensure the safety of the traveling public. We made sure that all flights still in the air were secure and could land safely. We immediately enhanced screening and security procedures for all flights, domestic and international. We added Federal air marshals to flights entering and leaving the United States. And we're working closely in this country—Federal, State, and local law enforcement—with our international partners.

Second, I've ordered two important reviews, because it's absolutely critical that we learn from this incident and take the necessary